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Lucy R. Lippard

The Geography of Street Time: A Survey of Street Works Downtown.

I should say at the outset that my decision to write about street works – ideally an ephemeral, rebellious, iconoclastic, out-reaching and non-commercial medium – reflects my dissatisfaction with the "downtown scene" as it has developed since around 1971, when so-called SoHo (even the name is imitative) hit its carnival stride. The area was once called "Hell's Hundred Acres" because of its concentration of sweat shops; in its sometimes lively decadence it may re-earn the name.

A good many artists have been living illegally in SoHo lofts since the 1950s. In 1968 the artists' co-op buildings were underway, but Paula Cooper had the only gallery below Houston Street. She opened her new space that November with a handsome minimal show organized as a benefit for the antiwar movement. Also in 1968, Ten Downtown – artists showing in their own lofts – provided an early example of extra-commercial, artist-organized exhibitions; and the next year 55 Mercer Street, founded by members of the Artworkers' Coalition, became the first of a new wave of co-op galleries.

There was at this point a mood of exhilaration, a feeling that control over art was being returned to the artists' community. In opposition to the intellectually demanding, often hostile and cliquish atmosphere of the 1960s avant-garde, the end of that decade saw a brief politicization of artists on a model set by Blacks and students. Resentment against the high style of the classy 60s, the domination of big money, the uptown galleries and audiences, a nascent awareness that art was being used indirectly by the capitalist establishment to support wars and exploitation – all of this contributed to the process of "decentralization" into the downtown area, although in retrospect, it is ironic and somewhat cynical to talk about decentralization (presumably epitomized by street works) in the heart of the bastion of international art centralization and all the vices inherent therein. Many artists and artworkers around 1969 desired some measure of independence from the system, though it

should be said that none of us at any time totally abandoned his or her marketplace for the freedom of open shows, picket lines, and street works. There was, however, much talk about such possibilities, culminating in the city-wide Art Strike at the time of the murders at Jackson State and Kent State, and the U.S. bombing of Cambodia.

The second gallery to move downtown had been O. K. Harris – the vulgar and vital vanguard of the hard sell. With the legalization of loft-living, the beatification of SoHo as a landmark area, and the resultant media attention, an unheard-of degree of commercialism replaced the initial community ideal. By 1971 the political excitement had died down. While the art basked in pluralism, the area slowly settled into a geography of boutiques, bars, and fancy food. When tourists began to appear on Saturdays (and later by the busload even during the week) it was clear that SoHo's fate was no longer in the hands of the original artists' community. Subsequent moves into "SoHo", "Tribeca", Brooklyn or the Flower District have simply expanded the reach of the "downtown scene". In the summer of 1975, a resident noted that the ratio of dogshit per block below Canal Street had doubled.

Since this new scene and the art it sponsored was the product less of esthetic than of political and commercial groupings, there developed a collage of unlikely networks: between artists and other artists, writers, poets, filmmakers, and musicians on one hand, and between them and the marketplace and the social superstructure on the other hand. Street works should characterize this overall disjunction. They are by definition vignettes – temporary, rootless within the system, free to create their own structures, and experienced casually, by a chance audience. The earlier street works, as well as works in public interior non-art spaces (subways, courthouses, etc.) constituted a dissatisfaction with what Robert Smithson called "cultural confinement", an attempt to move out of the gallery's enclosed

and pristine environment and into the World. SoHo, with its mix of expensive restaurants and truck-clogged and factory litter-strewn side streets, offered a perfect "land of contrasts". Yet most of the art shown in far-out SoHo is conventional painting and sculpture, and despite their possibilities for "novelty", there are amazingly few instances of bona fide street works over the last six years, even including those which are gallery-based. The following text does not claim to cover all the downtown street works, but I suspect it includes the large majority.

Although in the late 1950s artists like Oldenburg, Dine, Grooms and Kaprow went to the Lower East Side gutters for their materials and their subject matter, little actually happened in the public domain. In March 1964, the Fluxus group and its motley affiliates did the first (and only) of what had been planned as a series of Saturday street works on Canal Street. There were pieces by Alison Knowles, Dick Higgins, Ben Vautier and others; Robert Watts' **2 Inches** (a ribbon across the street intended to be cut, which was instead torn by cars) was broken up by the police. In 1968, Anne Healy defied police and permits to rig her first billowing fabric sculpture on the exterior of a West Broadway loft building. It was, however, in March 1969, that Street Works were officially baptized with a series of events organized by poet and critic John Perreault, artist Marjorie Strider, and visual poet Hannah Weiner.

The first of these was on Saturday, March 15, lasted 24 hours, took place in midtown (42nd to 52nd Streets between Madison and 6th Avenues) and included 20 people – artists, writers, performers, among them Vito Hannibal Acconci, Gregory Battcock, Meredith Monk, Anne Waldman, Les Levine, Arakawa, and myself. Street Works II was more concentrated, taking place on Friday, April 18, from 5 to 6 p.m., on one block (13 to 14th Streets, 5th to 6th Avenues). This time around 40 people participated. Where we had been freaks in midtown, we were part of the carnival on 14th Street. Poets handing out or reading their work had to compete with leafletters for fortune tellers and hawkers of dry goods, artists with the visual, auditory and odiferous stew of high honky-tonk commerce. 13th Street, on the other hand, was a factory area and offered a different atmosphere, as did each avenue.

Street Works III took place on May 25, a Sunday night, between Grand and Prince, Greene and Wooster, in what was not yet SoHo; this area was chosen because it was then so deserted. 700 people were invited to join and the event was aptly and darkly documented by Perreault with a flashless camera. Street

Works IV was an institutionalized insert into the series – sponsored by the Architectural League, with selected participants. Street Works V was "World Works", in which "artists and people everywhere are invited to do a street work in a street of their choice. A street work does not harm any person or thing". (The warning referred to John Giorno's Street Works III piece – sprinkling the street with nails, which resulted in flat tires not only for friends and the curious, but for the touring police, who stopped the event.) Among the 1969 street works:

Perreault's **Street Music**, utilizing the public phone booths in the area for a bell-ringing piece; and his **Survey**, in which "the questionnaire is the script, I and the person being interviewed are the actors; the set is the location, the costumes are the clothes we are wearing, the audience is all the other people on the street, the music is the natural sound, the dance is how we move in relation to each other".

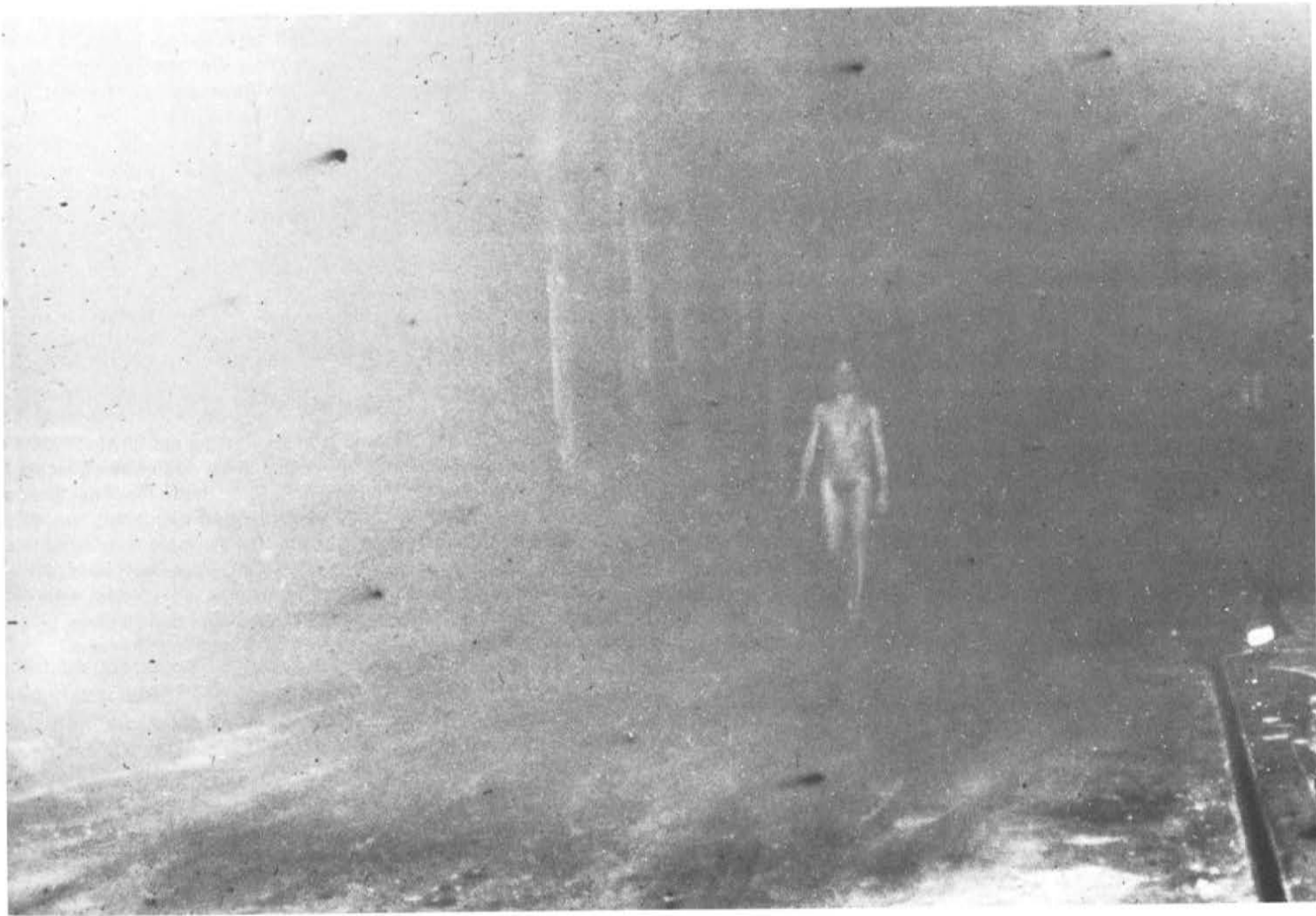
Steve Kaltenbach's offer of a package (contents unknown) for sale, starting cheap and mounting in "value" each time it was refused by a passerby.

Arakawa's blueprint of a house and grass yard on the sidewalk.

My **Contact Piece** – merging with the crowds and doing the following things one time per block: "Stare up at the tops of buildings until others do so too; turn now and then, look behind you, abruptly; look everyone coming toward you straight in the eye for as long as possible; when someone is coming at you and swerves to avoid collision, swerve in the same direction and keep it up as long as possible; speak to one person as though you knew him or her well; walk in step with people beside you."

Eduardo Costais **1000 Street Works** – "art works" unidentifiable as such placed on the street charged with the implications that art may have for the person who passes by and notices them as such.

Although most younger artists now working in these media are hardly aware of their predecessors, this Street Works Series, along with the Judson Dance Theater, was a major source of the current performance art. During a November 1970 panel at the School of Visual Arts, called "Performances are not Dance, Plays, Events", it became clear that it was easier to define, à la Reinhardt, what the new medium was **not** than what it was. Street performance was seen as a way of moving out of the art context, "turning **people** on, not artists", while taking note of the dangers of "doing things to people", exploiting an audience which had escaped art. Performance was also related to an



172 Scott Burton, "Dream", 1969

autobiographical and body art just then emerging, in part as a result of the Women's Movement and Consciousness Raising; in part as a result of a politically defiant "don't tell me what I can do" attitude which faded after 1970; and in part as a result of input from visually-oriented writers.

Scott Burton, as part of his series of "Self Works", walked 14th Street in Street Works II dressed as a woman, not "in drag" as he describes it, "but in ordinary, unremarkable woman's clothing (raincoat, umbrella, shopping bags). Total anonymity - as self (to acquaintances); as male, as performer (to all) Achievement of 'invisibility'; immaterial piece. And 'costumes'



174 Adrian Piper, "I am the Locus", 1975

concealment and revelation" (the artist, in *The Drama Review*, March 1972). Burton slept (and dreamed) at an exhibition opening and then walked nude on Lispenard Street at midnight in a re-enactment of a "classic anxiety dream" ("inversion of disguise piece? Violation of legality. Imitation of madness; strong self-directed effect"). In *Street Works III*, Burton had intended to lie nude in the gutter, anticipating the direction later taken by Chris Burden, but decided against its masochism and did a "Deaf Piece" instead.

Other sleep pieces have been performed by Colette, in the streets at dawn ("because of the associations attached to those particular hours of the day . . . those hours when everything that is real appears to be unreal"); and by Laurie Anderson, whose *Institutional Dream Series* took place in city government buildings such as Surrogate Court, Night Court, and the Immigration Bureau.

Vito Acconci, in 1969 a poet just emerging into the visual arts, was at first influenced by the conceptual street "exchange" pieces of Douglas Huebler; during the spring and summer of that year he gradually evolved his own concerns with the "interaction between the art activity and the daily living", aiming at "no separation, though ultimately **showing** it in an art context . . . I find that kind of performance tends to clarify things for me, as a kind of model experience . . ." (*A Space Bulletin*, 1971.) Acconci started out by roaming the streets either in accordance with preconceived patterns or guided by chance circumstances. He saw himself as a moving point; he paced out distances,



175 Richard Hayman, "Bellroll", 1975

picked out people to walk with or stare at. For *Street Works IV* he followed one person and stopped only when the subject "entered a private place". (Christine Kozlov had also projected a "following piece", but later "rejected" it as part of a rejection series.)

The ultimate risks inherent in this sort of public interaction have probably been taken by Adrian Piper. She began her *Catalysis Pieces* in New York streets and public places in 1970. In different parts of the city, she drastically altered her ordinarily attractive appearance so as to become a pariah. First this was done with "costume" – stuffing her clothes with balloons, her mouth with a towel, blowing gum bubbles all over her face, riding the D train from Grand Street with her clothes drenched in a noxious smelling mixture. Then she began to work with a more subtle kind of behavioral „eccentricity“, re-enacting in public events or conversations from her past, singing to herself and dancing to it, launching into long stories to amazed passersby she had stopped to ask the time. The most recent manifestation of this attempt to exorcise her past is the adoption of a male alter ego complete with Afro and shades called *The Mythic Being* – "a catalyst for the violences of our world, an alien presence in the artworld, but a familiar presence in the rest of the world". In his guise she has appeared in the streets and in newspaper ads, posters, and postcards.

All the while, Piper has totally avoided a confrontational art context, making no indication to her chance audience that this

was art or performance, and thus making the separations and connections between art and madness painfully invisible. She was determined to preserve "the power and uncategorized nature of the confrontation", denying any connection with "pre-established theatrical categories". Although she would later convey her activities to the art world by means of written texts, Piper began these lonely and frightening operations to avoid the "prestandardized" responses characteristic of art situations, which "prepare the viewer to be catalyzed, thus making actual catalysis impossible".

Costume, make-up, and props – standard theatrical materials – have played a considerable part in performance-oriented street works. They provide: a way of attracting an audience; a disguise which protects the artist from reality; and a mode of self-transformation important to the identity search that often parallels the carefully created public image.

"Witch Doctor" Stephen Varble, who has paraded SoHo on Saturdays in fifteen elegant "garbage costumes", sees street works as "freeing artists from the slavery of the galleries . . . I found my own audience and my own patrons there".

Martha Wilson and Jacki Apple, with four friends, took on the composite identity of "Claudia" – "a fantasy self who is powerful, gorgeous, mobile . . . the result of the merging of the realized and idealized self"; one Saturday in 1973, "Claudia", dressed fit to kill, lunched at the Plaza and then took a limousine to the SoHo galleries, engendering admiration and hostility.

Richard Hayman, after a sound performance at the 3 Mercer Street Store, rolled up the street dressed in bells and a mask.

Laurie Anderson has one-upped the local Juilliard students and wandering musicians by playing her violin on street corners wearing a long white garment and ice skates with their blades embedded in huge blocks of ice; her music comes partly from her bowing and partly from a hidden tape recorder, thus the name **Duets on Ice** (and its effect on puzzled passersby).

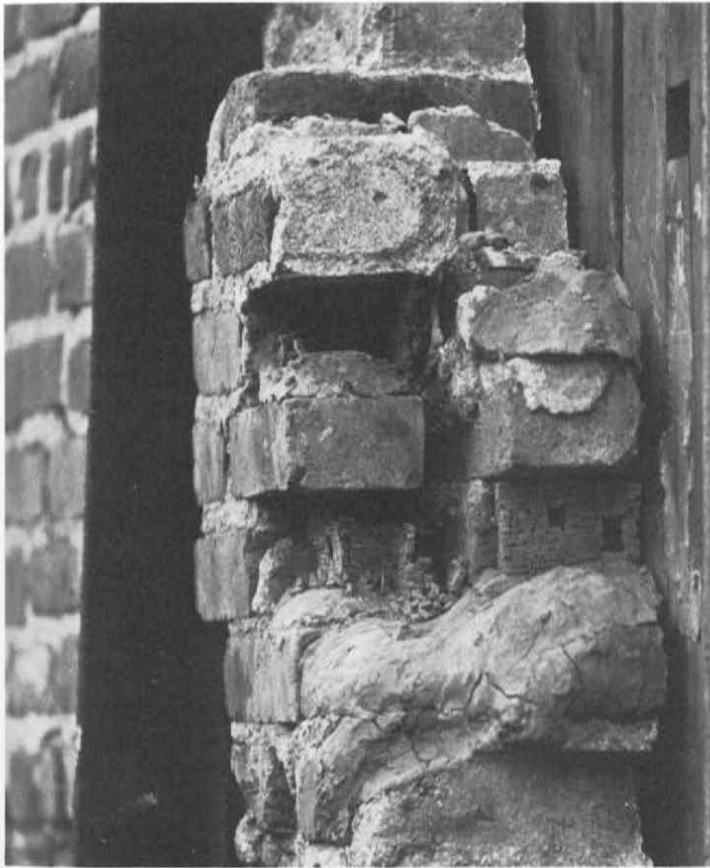
Izak Kleiner-Weinstock, seeing himself as a shaman and holy beggar, performed **Rite of Passage** daily on West Broadway in the Fall of 1974. Accompanied by the tape-recorded sound of walking in water, he "activated/transformed the space/street by walking in continuous circles – as in Zen meditation" and hoped to communicate to the spectator this "mantram of walking in water". A hat for contributions indicated that "money-energy in exchange for the transformed space" was gratefully accepted and was "integral to the survival of the art work".

Donna Henes has done a series of mask events at the South

Street Seaport, Battery Park, and on the Brooklyn Bridge. They arose from "an interest in free, public, non-elitist, de-mystified art". She and friends appear at a public place with plaster and materials and proceed to make free face masks of passersby, who then make masks of each other. The event on the Brooklyn Bridge (May 5, 1974) spread until there was "a community of a couple of hundred masked people suspended over the East River, sharing . . . interacting . . . then continuing back into their separate lives, taking with them something as concrete as a plaster mask . . . and as abstract as the ambiance of the experience".

Minoru Yoshida, self-described "epicurean of space universe", began doing street works concerned with energy and "the theory of new relativity" in SoHo in 1975. Garbed in a futuristic costume-machine, as an extension of his body, he is attached by fine lines upward to architectural elements. Accompanying literature is transcendent in tone: "The earth is so turbulent. Is it because man has been jammed into space so small there that he is unable to foresee the fact that he lives in such a wide space of the universe? The earth is so turbulent. Is it because the civilization man has been controlling has begun to control man?"

Street works tend to take two forms – impermanent physical objects or remains, and performances which last only as long as the action and, ideally, leave no pollution behind. One of the major virtues of such work is that it requires no dealer or sponsor other than the artist him or herself, and that it commands a readymade audience when it takes place in a naturally crowded area; otherwise, it must be announced ahead of time to attract a more specialized audience, and the level of artificiality is raised considerably. All too often, however, no real alternative to the marketplace is offered. Tiptoeing out of the gallery and into the streets, then rushing back to exhibit documentation, only parodies the need to form a "dialectic" between the real and the art worlds. While Robert Smithson never worked in an urban setting, preferring the tensions between city and country, site and non-site, he was for many years virtually the only artist to consider the ways in which art could **affect** life. If none of his earthworks can be said to have done so directly, had he lived, his unceasing efforts to work with strip mines and devastated industrial sites might finally have had that effect. However, in **urban** outdoor art, esthetic interest cannot overwhelm communication. **If the art has no effect on the audience and the audience has no effect on the art, the street work is not successful, and is hardly deserving of the name.**



177 Charles Simonds, "Dwelling", 1973

Today the SoHo Saturday is a freak show, a fashion parade; clowns, magicians, mimes and bagpipers vie with art performances. A street work done in this area, especially on the weekend, is obviously aimed at a moneyed and tourist art audience; it preaches to the converted, so that the initial validity and impact of working in the streets has virtually disappeared. In the early days of SoHo, however, there were many more laborers working in the area's small factories; the population was more varied in ethnic and economic background and knowledge of art, providing a more valid version of the "broad public".



This was the audience in the fall of 1970, when Charles Simonds moved out into the public domain with his migrating civilization of Little People, who live in raw clay landscapes dotted with dwellings, ritual places, and ruins built of tiny bricks directly in the streets or walls of vacant lots. In 1972, when the art world had diffused SoHo's street life, Simonds and the Little People moved to the Lower East Side, where the street is the heart of the community. Here people identified personally with the fragility and the dreamlike spaces of the dwellings, entering into the fantasy without art as an intermediary. In turn, Simonds too has been energized by the spontaneity of the situation and by the continual interaction with passersby. Building the dwellings is not a performance; the viewer as well as the maker must lose his or her role as audience or artist in order to enter

the other times and spaces of the Little People's world. The dwellings seem to belong in the niches and crannies of broken walls and sidewalks the way an organically evolved life architecture comes to belong to the land on which it has grown. They are rooted in several different levels of consciousness – the relationship between the earth and the artist's body, the earth and the city, the (often erotic) rituals of the imaginary civilization and the lives of the community which surrounds it; these levels have been articulated by the political and emotional needs of the audience. Working almost daily on the Lower East Side for 4 years has deeply affected Simonds' art: "The meaning of the dwellings comes more to **be** there . . . If I have to 'show' them to somebody, the experience is completely altered. The whole notion of surprise, of stumbling on a civilization of Little People is lost" (*Artforum*, Feb. 1974). Last summer, after three years of hurdling bureaucratic obstacles and stimulating local enthusiasm, he and the residents of East 2nd Street completed a much needed sculpture/playlot called "La Placita", and with the Lower East Side Coalition for Human Housing, he is working on the use and meaning of urban "open spaces" – or vacant lots in various stages of decay and destruction.

If all art teaches us how to see, street works incur a special responsibility to relate to or focus on their environment and/or their audience. This was the subject of some of the 1969 Street Works, such as:

Marjorie Strider's picture frames left in the streets to pictorialize specific places, views, or objects, "to call the attention of passersby to their environment"; in *Street Works III*, she placed a large banner labeled "Picture Frame" in front of the Architectural League door, "forcing people to walk through the picture plane"; in *Street Works V*, she put taped frames on the sidewalk, creating more picture spaces to walk through.

In *Street Works II*, Stephen Kaltenbach handed out a map with a "Guide to a Metropolitan Museum of Art", which listed 42 exhibits, such as: "Floor collage. Anon. wrecking crew. Plasterboard and tile. After Robert Morris"; "Air ducts, 2. Shaped aluminum"; "Sky framed by buildings. Air, light, dust, concrete and steel". The last six exhibits were "to be created by you". In the process, Kaltenbach not only invited random passersby to look, but created a neat satire on current art for the specialized audience.

In the *Whitney Annual* that winter, Robert Huot posted the location each day of a different anonymous "painting" somewhere in the city.

In February, 1972, Robert Whitman, well-known for his early theatre works, made a radio/street piece which had the same



focusing effect. While Whitman was at WBAI as the "receiver", 30 observers, each assigned to different areas of the city, phoned in to the station, reporting in a few seconds exactly what was happening outside the phone booth she occupied, thus providing "instant news", such as: "it's beginning to rain; a man just walked by with a large brown paper bundle . . ." Eyes and consciousnesses grew sharper as the half-hour piece progressed, and the observers found that in their last calls they were presenting "metaphors of themselves" as reflected in the environment. The result was an audio context which asserted itself in visual images of the life of the city.

Sometimes the chance audience happens upon mysterious "traces" of past activities, which may or may not be decipherable at a later date. Pavements provide a visible surface for graphic street works.

In 1969, Rosemarie Castoro rode up Fifth Avenue at midnight with a leaking can of paint on the back of her bicycle, leaving a wobbly Pollockesque trail to counter the strict traffic markings; for *Street Works II*, she "cracked" the block with a thin line of silver tape.

For *Street Works I*, Kaltenbach made "Trash Poems" dedicated to the city, composed of all words/phrases which appear face up on the sidewalk, to be read in the order encountered, with no established beginning or end – a circular, changeable, perishable poem.

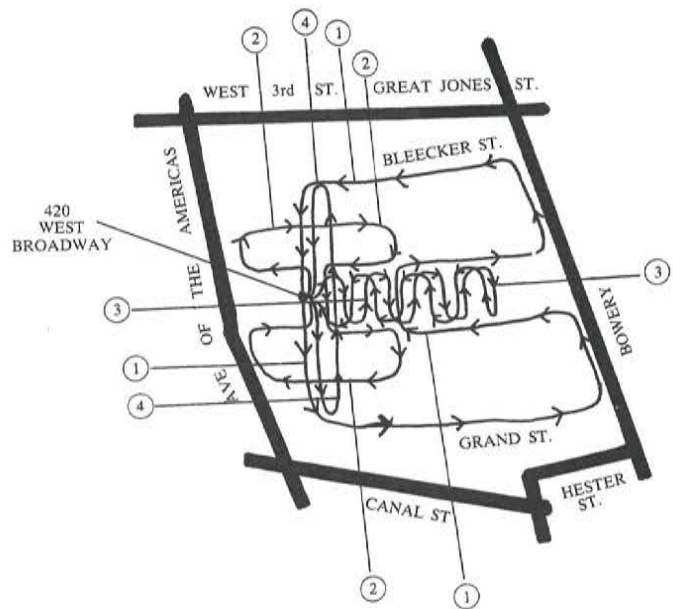
In a similar, if less poetic act, Les Levine littered 42nd Street with kleenexes stamped with "dirty words".

Colette has made several sidewalk pieces in SoHo with a trail system of personalized "morse code", which connects and simultaneously fragments the experience of walking.

Two young artists named Jody Elbaum and Stan Dyke have recently made street floor "paintings" with tape as well as paint – the most interesting extending a triangular park at Duane and Hudson with an aerial view of trash baskets, light poles and walls.

Several years ago Robert Huot left small piles of pornographic magazines in desolate downtown working areas; the next day they had all disappeared.

Ralston Farina, who does his own off-beat performances in and outdoors, is mainly concerned with time and its effects. Last Spring he put sacks of flour at the intersection of Spring and West Broadway, creating clouds, or snowstorms, when cars ran over them; dogbiscuits were laid on the street and outlined in chalk (like accident victims) and he wrote: "When the truth



BALLETS No. 5

"SOHO"

FIVE PERFORMERS

MAY 31, 1975

FROM 1:00 P.M. TO 4:00 P.M.

ROUTE 1
USING FIVE COLORS: A,B,C,D,E



ROUTE 2
USING FIVE COLORS: A,B,C,D,E



ROUTE 3
USING FIVE COLORS: A,B,C,D,E



ROUTE 4 FIRST PART
USING ONE COLOR: A



ROUTE 4 SECOND PART
USING ONE COLOR: A & WHITE



ROUTE 4 THIRD PART
USING ONLY WHITE



vanishes from the arts, it's gone forever", which might serve as an epitaph for SoHo.

A lower profiled manner of attracting attention to the details of a place or a surface was suggested by Richard Artschwager with his "blps" – small oblong shapes that appeared spray-painted inside and outside the Paula Cooper Gallery in May 1969 – in the stairwell, high on the wall of a facing building, on a mailbox, and on up the street, causing a disquieting "image return", a network of remembered forms for the observant resident.

Daniel Buren has been papering the world with his vertically striped posters (always the same, though in different colors) for almost a decade now. They are primarily intended as theoretical expanders of the art context, but they also provide the visual jolt characteristic of street works. The first ones to appear in New York were on billboards, walls and storefronts in October 1970; they were put up independently, though the action was repeated in 1973 under the aegis of the John Weber Gallery. Buren's posters are an attempt to "demystify the artist, the act of painting, the object of art, the object and its dematerialization as subject of formal or esthetic interest". In May, 1975, he animated his posters by having a group of five people carry them in a parade around seven different neighborhoods (Chinatown, East Village, Greenwich Village, Times Square, SoHo, Central Park and Wall Street). Each day several routes were traveled and the color combinations of the placards changed. Buren called this **Seven Ballets in Manhattan**. The "dancers" found that each area had its own character and its own way of dealing with unfamiliar phenomena; the least interesting was SoHo, where the audience was jaded and unimaginative. Buren's pieces exist both in their visual fragmentation and on a highly conceptual level, bolstered by written texts. As Elizabeth Baker has pointed out, he is "a mixture of theorist, idealist, unavowed formalist, polemicist and art provocateur" (*Art News*, March 1971). The posters have an activist side (he has been arrested for nocturnal poster-pasting) and a contemplative side, which together constitute an effective criticism of art as it exists in this society.

In the spring of 1976, Carol Kinne turned street activity into a vehicle for easel painting by stapling a series of circular color abstractions painted on clear plastic contact paper around the Broadway-Lafayette area, where they provide an unexpected counterpart to the neighborhood collage (which includes, incidentally, some extraordinary pencil drawings by a local street person).

November, 1974: Zadik Zadikian painted a large old billboard on Varick Street a brilliant yellow to brighten up the lives of commuters through the Holland Tunnel.

Denise Green has recently been making "guerilla" fresco paintings on the outsides of downtown buildings, despite persecution by managerial art-haters.

Robert Janz's street works have usually been done in tandem with gallery shows, but the two pieces he made in downtown New York existed independently in the city – visible, if not comprehensible, to the passersby with certain powers of observation. **Six Sticks**, executed in March 1975, was clearly an important experience for the artist, who described their placement as "a ceremony that explored some of the features of the urban landscape". The rectangular rods, placed in doorways, shadows, across sidewalks, against walls, long enough to be photographed, had a small, perhaps non-existent audience. Janz sees this sculpture as performance, the sticks as actors. In the second piece, a year later, he departed from the opening line of Paul Klee's **Pedagogical Sketchbook** – "a line on a walk . . . a walk for a walk's sake,". Klee's S-curve was drawn with chalk on intersections, corners, angles in the city; the lines are impermanent enough to satisfy ecological ethics but unlike the sticks, they are there to be seen. The graceful and cryptic curve must invoke some curiosity from passersby.

Janz's street works were part of an ongoing series of "New Urban Landscapes" sponsored by the Institute for Art and Urban Resources, a unique organization concerned in part with recycling city-owned spaces for art and artists. This series is supposed to represent "a wide variety of avant-garde disciplines to transmit through their art, images of Lower Manhattan to the people who live and work there". Yet most of their projects, interesting though some may be on esthetic levels, make virtually no contact with an audience.

Peter Barton, for instance, placed an abstract metal sculpture in various locations and keyed it into a time structure determined by complex satellite reckonings, in order to achieve "a vast range of implications that transcend the merely visual product". Such a piece, however, is inaccessible to its audience and exists primarily as a trophy, to be carried back in the form of documentation to the elite.

Equally invisible, but somewhat more sensitive to its purpose, was Bill Beirne's poignant . . . **Why Are You Leaving Me?**, one of a series of pieces in which he "attempts to force the indigenous activities of a specific location to interact with his presence there". Interested in the emptying-out process of densely populated urban spaces at the end of the workday, and the "simultaneous convergence of thousands of pedestrians on a few points of departure", he stood at the entrance to the Port

KUNST AUF DEN DOWNTOWN STRASSEN



182 Joan Jonas, "Delay Delay", 1972

und wie Tausende von Fußgängern gleichzeitig an wenigen Abfahrtstellen zusammenströmen. Er stand am Eingang des Trans Hudson Verkehrssystems der Port Authority und "versuchte mitzuteilen, daß es für jemanden notwendig sei zu verweilen, um gegenüber der hier herrschenden Hektik einfach eine oppositionelle Haltung einzunehmen".

Die Dächer Downtown Mannhattans bildeten die verschiedenen Ebenen einer luftigen Bühne für eine Performance von Trisha Brown 1975 und eine Aussichtsplattform für eine sich über 6 Blocks im Quadrat erstreckende Performance von Joan

Jonas 1972, in welche sie die Piers, die leeren Bauplätze und auf die Straßen gemalte Kreise und Linien einbezog, während sie den Verkehr dadurch behinderte, daß sie in einem Reifen hindurchrollte. Aus den leeren, zeitweise vom Kapitalismus aufgegebenen Bauplätzen sind ebenfalls "Skulpturengärten" und Bühnen geworden.

1969 tätigte Les Levine seinen **Prozeß der Elimination** auf einem Grundstück an der Houston Street, wo er 300 Schaumgummiplatten deponierte, von denen er jeden Tag einen Teil wegnahm, also aus einem Environment eher etwas eliminierte als hinzufügte – eine Idee, die zu der Zeit ziemlich en vogue war.

Poppy Johnsons "Earth Day Action" 1970 bewies, daß Hinzufügen das Wegnehmen übertrumpfen kann; sie und ihre Freunde rodeten ein leerstehendes Grundstück an der Ecke Greenwich und Duane Street und pflanzten dort Sonnenblumen. Zum größten Teil waren aber Bürgerinitiativen wie die Green Guerillas aktiver und einfallsreicher als die Künstler dieser Gegend.

Um dieselbe Zeit baute Gordon Matta "Müllmauern" auf leerstehenden Grundstücken aus mit Mörtel gemischten Abfällen, die der Auflösung und Rückkehr zu ihrem ursprünglichen Zustand überlassen wurden. 1971 veranstaltete er eine Aufführung, die er **Jack** nannte, bei der er stehengelassene Wagen auf leerstehenden Grundstücken aufführte. 1972 mietete er einen riesigen Müllwagen, parkte ihn auf der Greene Street, baute darin ein einstöckiges "Haus" aus Materialien, die er in verlassenen Mietshäusern gefunden hatte, und belebte es mit Geräuschen. Im nächsten Jahr fand er einen noch größeren Müllwagen und machte daraus eine zweistöckige "Wohnung", deren Einweihung er mit einem Hähnchen-Barbecue auf der Straße feierte. Matta brachte in einem Sommer auch einen Karren mit frischer Luft nach Wall Street und bot den Arbeitern in der Mittagspause Sauerstoff an.

1973 errichtete Mary Miss auf einem Abladeplatz nahe dem Battery Park vorübergehend eine mehrteilige hölzerne Konstruktion mit sinkenden kreisförmigen Öffnungen, die eindrucksvoll den Blick auf den Fluß und die Aussicht auf New Jersey und die umliegenden Mondlandschaften intensivierten. Sie war schwer erreichbar, aber in den Augen der Künstlerin wurde das dadurch aufgewogen, daß sie nicht mutwillig zerstört wurde, wie es mit einem früheren Stück auf Ward's Island passiert war.

Im Februar 1975 erhielt Jim Pavlicovic die Erlaubnis, ein bogen-



183 Trisha Brown, "Roof Piece", 1973

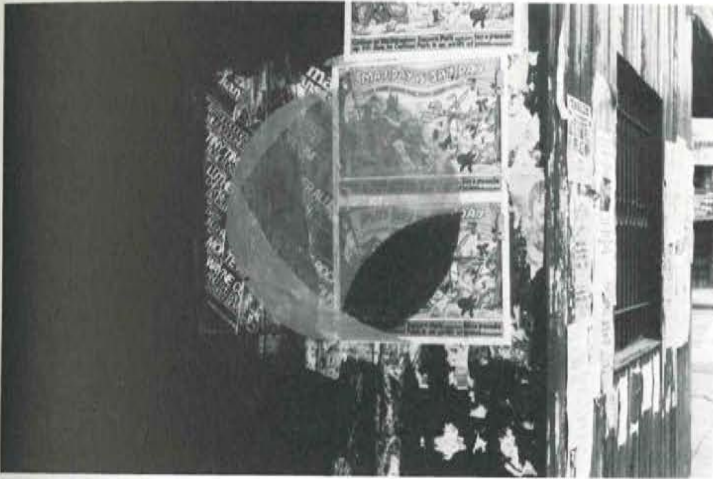
Authority Trans Hudson System and "attempted to communicate the need for someone to stay by simply assuming a posture in opposition to the activity taking place there".

The roofs of downtown Manhattan provided an airy multi-level stage for a 1975 performance by Trisha Brown, and a viewing platform for a 6-square-block performance by Joan Jonas in 1972, in which she incorporated the piers, the vacant lots, painted circles and lines in the streets, and obstructed traffic

by rolling through in a hoop. The vacant lots temporarily abandoned by capitalism have also become "sculpture gardens" and stages.

*In 1969, Les Levine made his **Process of Elimination** in a lot on Houston Street, placing 300 sheets of polyexpandable foam there and removing a portion each day, subtracting rather than adding objects to the environment – an idea much in vogue at the time.*

Poppy Johnson's Earth Day action in 1970 proved that adding



185 Carol Kinne, "4 Card Elim for PA", 1976

can beat subtracting; she and friends cleared a vacant lot on Greenwich and Duane streets and planted sunflowers. For the most part, however, community development groups, such as the Green Guerrillas, have been more active and more imaginative than artists in this area.

Around the same time, Gordon Matta was building "garbage walls" in empty lots from the debris mixed with plaster; they were left to disintegrate and return to their original states. In 1971, he did a performance called **Jacks** which consisted of propping up abandoned cars in another lot, and in 1972 he rented a huge trash drag-on, parked it on Greene Street, built in it a single-story "house" with materials found in abandoned tenements, and activated it with a sound performance. The next year he got a larger drag-on and made a two-story "apartment" in it, celebrating the opening with a chicken barbecue in the street. Matta also took a "fresh air cart" down to Wall Street one summer, offering oxygen to the workers at lunch hour.

In 1973, on a landfill area near Battery Park, Mary Miss temporarily erected a multipartite wooden structure which through a descending circular aperture impressively focused the river, the view of New Jersey, and the lunar landscape surrounding it. It was hard to get to, but this was offset in the artist's mind by the fact that it was not vandalized, as an earlier public piece on Ward's Island had been.

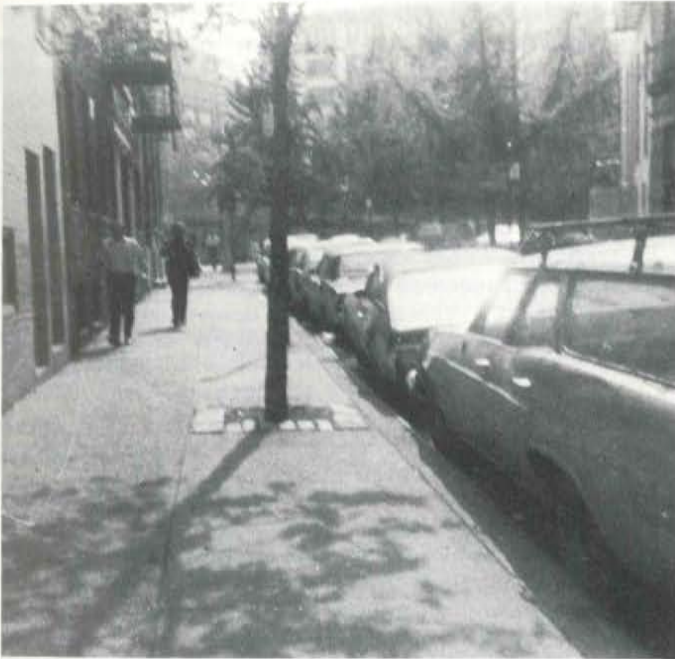


186 Gordon Matta-Clark, "Jacks", 1971

In February, 1975, Jim Pavlicovic was permitted to make a plaster, arc-shaped relief on the outside of Trinity Church, on Broadway and Wall Street; it drew people inside to see his drawings, but he was chagrined to find that their level of abstraction drove dignified businessmen to insulting graffiti.

When Richard Serra was looking for a place to erect the "drawing" for a large sculpture in 1974, he chose a lot on West Broadway below Canal and simply set to work, figuring that if he asked for permission he wouldn't get it. There was quite a bit of interest from neighborhood workers when they found it was a sculpture going up, and not another McDonald's. Holes were dug; posts were put in, and the general structure was built, though not filled in, when the landlord caught on and threatened to sue. He was held off for a few days with promises of money until Serra had gotten a pretty clear idea of what the finished piece could be. When the enraged owner finally brought in bulldozers at 7 a.m. and razed the piece, he was, by law, required to "improve the property once it had been bulldozed", and had to make his own sculpture by moving 60 piles of dirt around for 7 weeks.

A large-scale prototype for such activities (though officially condoned) was the exhibition organized by Alana Heiss on an old pier under the Brooklyn Bridge in 1971. It included Jene Highstein's huge wooden **Chute for Looking Up and Down**,



Tina Girouard's whimsical houseplan laid out in the dirt, Matta's pig roast, and, temporarily, one of Anne Healy's sail sculptures, which had to be dismantled because the professional riggers were unable to cope with its delicate technology.

The *real* prototype for this notion of appropriating public space as an outdoor gallery is of course the famous Washington Square Art Show, which Matta recently tried (and failed) to enter, setting up his own graffiti show around for corner. Following its premise, but not its sales techniques, Scott Burton placed a single heavy bronze cast of an ordinary chair on the sidewalk across from his show at Artists Space in 1975; since it was not for sale, someone came along with a dolly and simply tried to take it away.

The notion of using the exterior-interior window spaces, in galleries or elsewhere, has produced some provocative tensions between art and life contexts.

In 1970, Strider's great gobs of colored polyurethane foam, oozing from the windows of an upper story factory loft on Greene Street, gave the weird impression that the contents had outgrown the container.

Simonds has twice built dwellings for the Little People on the window ledge at 112 Greene Street, in 1970 and then in 1974, with a piece that went "through" the glass to bring the outside in and the inside out.

Stefan Eins' 3 Mercer Street Store has had several events taking place inside and outside, or visible through the large windows so the gallery became a display box; for instance, video pieces by Dieter Froese and Willoughby Sharp, which were pointed out the window.

Farina held a treasure hunt around 1970 in which "clue sheets" were sold for 50 c, and clues were presented through objects and performances in the windows of a tea shop, a barber shop, and a dress shop in SoHo; no-one won, and a \$100 bill has yet to be found.

In 1974, Buren made **Within and Beyond the Frame** – a line of his striped posters on cloth, which hung the vertical length of the Weber Gallery, went out the window, and continued across the street.

Jan van Raay constructed her own wood and glass window structure for the corner of Broome and West Broadway in Fall 1975; in front of it she displayed a colorful dead octopus, and through it she photographed people's responses, pasting the polaroids up on both sides of the glass until the window was full.

Bill Beirne, in a 1976 show at 112 Greene Street, wrote a complex

text (almost illegibly) in white paint on the front window. In this case the inside/outside format had a particular reference to the "implications of inclusion/exclusion . . . as it applied to the selection process involved in the art context"; the text, dealing with the machinations involved in getting to show at the gallery, and keyed into a list of personalities, read, significantly, from **inside** the gallery, so one was lured in rather than out – perhaps an unconscious commentary on the purpose of the piece,

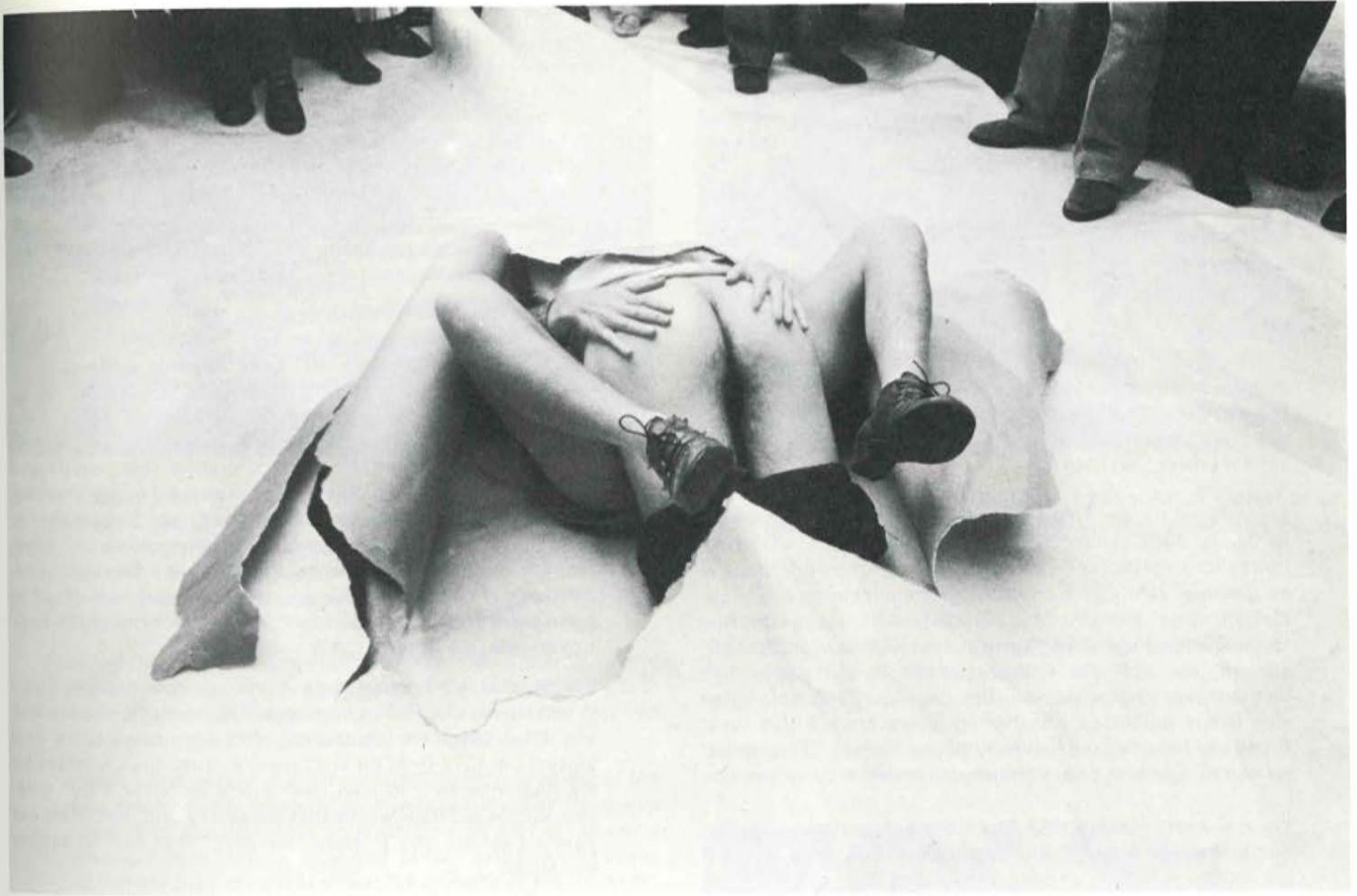
Probably the most effective window piece yet has been Red and Mimi Grooms' **Ruckus Lower Manhattan**, constructed on the mostly glass-walled ground floor of 88 Pine Street, during the winter of 1975–76, in full view of the entire working population; when it was completed and opened to the public, most of the Wall Street community were familiar with and fond of every detail. A few months later, an expanded version of the piece was shown at the Marlborough Galleries, some of it visible from 57th street, all of it maintaining the lively illusion of freedom from all commercial contexts even in the heart of enemy territory.

In 1976, at the time of his uptown show "What Can the Federal Government Do For You", Les Levine plastered the streets of SoHo with a "campaign poster" for himself in which he looked Japanese ("Everybody has to go to the Orient now to get elected; the *real* power and mystery are in the East"). One response to this piece was that it defaced the beauty of SoHo – curious, since posterpasting is a local obsession, and a surface reflection of what SoHo is all about. (Around 1974, an unknown individual who became known as the "Poster Killer" protested the growing wall litter in SoHo by leaving hate messages on each new layer.)

Jonathan Price, capitalizing on this activity, makes "Paste-Ups" – mounting single poster strips around a SoHo already crammed with pretentious absurdities, and then photographing them to print on linen and show in galleries, as his "answer to Photo-realism". The strips pose questions like "How Remote is This Site?", and "How Can Art Refer Only to Art?", or make trite statements like "Art Contrasts Idea With Vision", "Seeing is Imagining".

A more provocative manifestation, unintended as art, was "Professor George's" wall on Greene Street, covered by political messages in an obsessive white script. The bearded writer was a resident squatter in SoHo long before the shoppes moved in. George has a background in radical labor and also gives booming and articulate nocturnal monologues on the state of the world. His wall has now disappeared under a refurbished SoHo.

Street works are, or should be by nature political acts of rejection or celebration. Some of the most effective events have been straightforward but imaginative propaganda:



190 Tosun Bayrack, "Love America or Live", 1971

In the early 1960s Robert Nichols did guerilla plays against the Lower Manhattan Expressway, and the Puerto Rican Teatro Ambulante continues this tradition on the Lower East Side.

As a preliminary for Angry Arts Week Against the War in January 1967, a Poets Caravan served as mobile streetcorner platform for protest and performance; the same year six decorated "floats", one covered in "tombstones" (stuffed rubber gloves), started out from SoHo with artists and writers who performed

at the Spring Mobilization Against the Vietnam War. Around 1969 some of the same artists joined a troupe marching down West Broadway to mail graphic protest "presents" to the War Chief, or Secretary of Defense.

Yayoi Kusama did a "naked demonstration" at the Stock Exchange in 1968, utilizing the "anatomic explosion" to demand cessation of taxpaying, destruction of the stock system, and the end of the war.



In 1970, the Judson Church, cradle of some of downtown's liveliest arts, housed the People's Flag Show, a protest against repressive laws on the use of the American flag, which culminated in the arrest of artists Jon Hendricks, Faith Ringgold, and Jean Toche.

Ralph Ortiz, Richard Schechner and others gave guerilla theatre events in front of NYU's Loeb Student Center against the U.S. bombings in Cambodia, an abomination which also inspired Yvonne Rainer's moving **Dead March** through SoHo.

In the same period, the Artworkers' Coalition, meeting at the Museum for Living Artists on Broadway and Waverly Place, was invaded by the F.B.I. after an invitation was sent out to come discuss how to "kidnap Kissinger". In 1970 they posted a series of Reinhardtian questions about the morality of the art world. The AWC and the Artists' and Writers' Protest were also responsible for a funeral procession, in another antiwar march, where black body bags, one for each year of the war, the same kind used to transport the dead in Vietnam, were carried up to Central Park, accompanied by a 100' long banner listing the names of American and Vietnamese victims.

In 1971, Tosun Bayrak staged a gigantic "undercover street theater" on three blocks of Prince Street covered with white paper. Titled **Love America or Live**, it titillated and apalled a large audience with blood, guts, nudity, rape, snakes eating rats, people urinating, defecating and fucking, dogs, children, pig fetuses, and a staged fight between a black and a white man which was broken up by the police. Homeopathically intended to expose violence by violence, to "dramatize the so-called American way of life and love by projections, emissions and



191 Guerilla Art Action Group: *Flag Protest at Courthouse*, 1970 (Protest gegen die Fahne vor dem Gerichtsgebäude)



KUNST AUF DEN DOWNTOWN STRASSEN

So ein Protest gegen den Protest kann sich noch negativer äußern, wie es zum Beispiel der willkürliche Vandalismus tat, der während der letzten Jahre in SoHo auftrat; es wurde Farbe gegen Gebäude gespritzt, Fenster wurden zertrümmert, und auf ein Bild in einer Galerie am West Broadway wurde "For Sale" geschrieben. Anscheinend weiß niemand, ob es eine amoklaufende Randgruppe derselben anonymen Gruppe ist, die die May Day-Plakate überstempelte, oder ob sie zu denen gehören, die letzten Sommer mit mehr Effekt Pattex in die Schlösser sämtlicher SoHo-Galerien schmierten. Sie waren es auch, die Plakate anklebten, die frühere Forderungen wiederholten, wie zum Beispiel: "Solange die Kunst durch Institutionen des Privateigentums kontrolliert wird, haben die Künstler wenig Kontrolle über das, was sie als Kunst produzieren oder was mit diesem Produkt nach der Fertigstellung passiert. Wäre es nicht möglich, daß die Abschaffung des Privateigentums auch die Trennung zwischen dem Künstler und seinem Werk abschafft? Sind Galerien nicht einfach Privateigentum, das ausgestellt wird? Und sind Künstler nicht einfach ausgestellt als Privateigentum? . . . Künstler! Die Galerien zu schließen wäre das Beste, was uns passieren könnte. Galerien isolieren uns. Galerien zwingen uns, miteinander zu konkurrieren. Galerien geben uns die Illusion der Freiheit ohne die Wirklichkeit der Macht. Die Galerien werden wieder aufmachen! Warum benutzen wir nicht die Zeit, um unsere Stellung in der Gesellschaft zu überdenken? Wir sind alle Opfer, das ist klar. Aber wenn wir fortfahren, Alternativen zu ignorieren, werden wir auch hilflos bleiben."

bursts from the underbelly of the city", it was probably the most controversial street work performed in New York.

The Guerilla Art Action Group has made several protest pieces in and around City Hall and the downtown court buildings, several of which centered around the flag desecration issue. To raise money for McGovern in 1972, they sold engraved copies of their letter to Nixon ("Eat What you Kill") on West Broadway, and distributed the second version of the AWC's Mylai Massacre poster.

In the fall of 1973, after the military takeover of Chile, a large group of artists and writers publicly mourned the demise of Allende's Marxist government by copying a work of the famous Chilean mural brigades on cardboard panels which were painted outdoors on West Broadway by protesters and passersby and later paraded up Fifth Avenue.

On a rainy May-Day, 1976, the Artists Meeting for Cultural Change handed out roses in the street and plastered SoHo with posters reading "Celebrate May Day"; anonymous opponents of this action rubberstamped over them "We the Bourgeoisie", "On the Backs of the Proletariat", and changed May Day to Pay Day.

Such protest against protest can be still more negative, such as the random vandalism that has taking place in SoHo over the last year; paint has been splashed on buildings, windows have been smashed, and "For Sale" was written across a painting in a West Broadway gallery. Nobody seems to know whether this is a berserk fringe of the same anonymous group who stamped the May-Day posters, or of those who, with more eclat, squirted epoxy glue into the locks of all the SoHo galleries last summer and posted a broadside echoing earlier efforts by the AWC. It read in part: "As long as art is controlled by the institution of private property, artists will have little control over what they make as art or what happens to that product once they make it. Isn't it possible that the elimination of private property would also eliminate this separation between artists and their work? Aren't galleries simply private property on display? Aren't artists simply on display as private property? . . . Artists! Closing the galleries is the best thing that could happen to us. Galleries isolate us. Galleries force us to compete against each other. Galleries give us the illusion of freedom without the reality of power. The Galleries Will Open Again! Why not use this time to reconsider our social practice? Of course we're all victims. But if we continue to ignore alternatives we will remain helpless as well."

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